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ABSTRACT

Presented in this report are the findings of two surveys which were administered to parents of children attending magnet schools in St. Louis. Results of the surveys, the Magnet/Pilot Parent Questionnaire and the Parent Participation Questionnaire are used to illustrate: (1) how parent participation differed in magnet, other (non-magnet) public schools and non-public schools; (2) how magnet schools were viewed as a means of desegregation; (3) how satisfied parents were with the quality of the magnet schools; and (4) what differences existed between the perceptions of black and white parents, and parents of bussed and non-bussed children. It is pointed out that the results of the surveys indicate that if educational alternatives such as magnet schools are used, parents of the school community will become more involved in educational processes and be more satisfied with the education their children are receiving. It is also pointed out that this increased satisfaction and involvement occur independently of race and does not appear to be negatively influenced by busing. Tables showing statistical results gathered from the two questionnaires and samples of the questionnaires are appended. (Author/EB)

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PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF MAGNET SCHOOLS AS A METHOD OF DESEGREGATION

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The school year 1976-77 was the initial year of operation for the magnet schools of the St. Louis Public School System. Approximately 2,500 children were enrolled in the seven elementary and two secondary magnet schools. Since the use of magnet schools could become an important factor in any effort to desegregate the city's public schools and since the ultimate success of any desegregation efforts in a city the size of St. Louis is dependent upon the feelings, perceptions and attitudes of parents, the Division of Evaluation decided to conduct two separate but related surveys of parents with school aged children. The first questionnaire, the Magnet/Pilot Parent Questionnaire (MPQ), was administered to parents of children attending schools involved in the magnet and pilot programs supported by ESAA (Emergency School Assistance Act) funds; the second, the Parent Participation Questionnaire (PPQ), was administered to parents of students in magnet schools, other (non-magnet) public schools, and non-public schools. From the parent feedback it was hoped to determine: (1) how parent participation differed in magnet, non-magnet public, and private/parochial schools; (2) how magnet schools were viewed as a means of desegregation; (3) how satisfied parents were with the quality of the magnet schools; and (4) what differences existed between the perceptions of black and white parents, and parents of bussed and non-bussed children.

METHOD

Questionnaire Design - Both questionnaires were constructed by the evaluation staff members who were assigned to the ESAA magnet/pilot school project with input from program staff. Items for the MPQ were constructed to tap three major areas of concern, as listed below.

1. Quality of education (QUAL. ED.)

   Should the school be continued?
   How successful was the program in providing a quality education?

How successful was the program in providing a unique curriculum?
Parent satisfaction with the school.
Quality of staff (problems with).
Quality of administration (problems with).
Difference between their school and others.
Parent impact on the school.
Student Satisfaction.
Student learning.
Quality of teachers (compared to last year).

2. *Factors affecting relations between races (RAC. REL.)*

Success in reducing racial isolation.
Success in promoting positive race relations.
(Problems with) relations between black and white students.
(Problems with) racial attitudes of students.
(Problems with) racial attitudes of staff.

3. *Barriers to basic instructional implementation (INST. IMPL.)*

(Problems with) transportation.
(Problems with) basic school supplies.
(Problems with) textbooks.
(Problems with) special supplies.

The PPQ was designed to assess the involvement of parents in school-related activities. The bulk of items on this survey form dealt specifically with parent attendance at school functions and frequency of visits to the school. Other questions concerned parent support of the magnet school concept and perceptions of their impact on the school.

Sampling Procedures - Samples for both questionnaires were selected from computerized student roster files maintained by the St. Louis Public Schools. Files were to be sorted for detection and removal of all but one record per family. This was done in order to ensure that the probability of selection would be the same for each parent or parent set rather than to be higher for parents of large families (for example four or more children) than for parents of small families (e.g., three or fewer children). While the file deviated somewhat from these specifications, we were able to remove nearly all of the

exceptions by hand (i.e., those which would have been sent multiple copies of the same questionnaire).

Two separate files were used. One contained information only on students enrolled in the magnet or pilot programs. From this file a simple random sample of 720 parents was selected by the computer, which then printed mailing labels for each parent selected. These labels were then placed on the envelopes used to send out the MPQ. The other file contained information on every parent of a student enrolled in the St. Louis Public Schools (including magnet and pilot schools) plus parents of students enrolled in non-public schools in the city of St. Louis. This latter group (i.e., parents of non-public school children) was somewhat biased in that it did not include all parents of non-public students. This limitation is due to the fact that the only non-public schools for which information was available were those which were receiving ESEA, Title I funds for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. While all parents on the non-public rosters were economically disadvantaged, the sample of non-public parents was biased in that direction. Thus the general family income level of the non-public parents was not representative of non-public parents as a group.

Survey Administration - The surveys were mailed to the selected parents on a staggered schedule. The MPQ was mailed during the second week of April, 1977; the PPQ was mailed the following week. Each parent received a survey form with accompanying cover letter and stamped return envelope. After a three-week interval a follow-up mailing was conducted to thank those who had already completed the survey and to urge those who hadn't to complete and return them as soon as possible. May 16, 1977 was set as the final date for receipt of forms.

Return rates for the two questionnaires differed. On the MPQ, 424 of the 720 parents sampled completed the questionnaires, for a 59% return. A smaller proportion (278 of 750, or 37%) of sampled parents returned the PPQ.

Analysis - The completed survey forms were coded and keypunched for data analysis. Initial analysis included crosstabulations of respondent groups (e.g., non-magnet public, magnet, non-public) by response categories (e.g., Yes - No; Severe, Moderate, Slight, or No Problem) and calculation of chi-square values, using the CROSSTABS procedure of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). These preliminary analysis indicated that there were a number of items on which some response categories were so infrequently used that some cells in the contingency tables would have very small (i.e., less than 5) expected frequencies. Examples of such cases include the "Unsuccessful" category and the "Severe Problem" category on the MPQ - Consequently, additional analyses were performed with categories combined such that it was necessary to deal with only two response categories per item.

RESULTS

Presentation of the survey results will be organized around the four areas of inquiry mentioned above. More specifically:

1. How does parent participation differ among magnet, regular public, and non-public schools?
2. How do parents view magnet schools as a means of desegregation?
3. How satisfied were parents with the quality of the magnet schools?
4. Were there differences in the perceptions of black and white parents, and between parents of children who were bussed to school and parents of children who were not bussed?

(1) Parent Participation. Results for the complete PPQ are summarized in Table 1. Unless otherwise indicated, all figures reported in Table 1 are expressed as percentages. The first seven questions for which data are presented are those dealing specifically with parent involvement. The eighth line is a composite of these seven, derived by averaging the percentages. The data generally indicate a slightly higher level of participation reported by non-public parents over magnet school parents, although the differences were statistically significant ($p < .05$) on only one item (PTA meeting). Both the non-public and the magnet parents reported higher levels of participation than did the regular public parents. The largest difference between magnet and regular public parents was in perceived impact on the schools. Sixty-three percent of the magnet parents felt that they had a large impact on what happened at school, opposed to only 36% of the non-magnet public school parents. Of the seven independent measures, private parents were significantly higher ($p < .05$) than non-magnet parents on six and magnets were significantly higher on four. Both public and magnet were significantly higher on the overall (line 8).

(2) Magnet Schools as a Means of Desegregation. Two items on the PPQ (Table 1, Items 13 and 14) tapped parents' support of the magnet school concept. Not surprisingly, the vast majority (95%) of magnet parents indicated that they favored the magnet concept. Clear majorities of parents in the other two groups also indicated that they favored the concept. There were actually a number, albeit a small number, of students leaving non-public schools to enroll in the magnets during their first year of operation.

Also substantial numbers of non-public and non-magnet parents indicated that they would have their children apply for admission if the magnet schools were substantially increased. Although the responses made to questions on a mailed survey may not translate into corresponding actions, this information does

indicate that the supply of students for the magnet schools has not been exhausted. Given an attractive choice of new programs and sites, potential for expansion of the program does seem to exist.

(3) Parent Satisfaction with the Quality of the Magnet Schools. Table 2 summarizes the results of the MPQ for all magnet school respondents. Results were broken down corresponding to the three areas of parent satisfaction discussed earlier in this paper. Lines 12, 18, and 23 show the composite positive response across each of three areas. With percentages of 80 for quality education, 84 for reducing racial isolation and 75 for instructional implementation, it should be apparent that an overwhelming majority of parents were satisfied with the quality of the magnet schools. Some items deserve special mention. Item 1 indicated that 96% of the parents desired to see the school continued. Items 9 and 10 show that better than 2 of every 3 parents felt that their children were not only more satisfied in the magnet schools, but that they were learning more than they did in their previous schools.

(4) Differences in perceptions of black and white parents and bussed and non-bussed students. The results of the MPQ presented in Table 2 were partitioned to determine what, if any, differences existed between the parents of different races (Table 3) and the parents of bussed and non-bussed students (Table 4). The three major categories of Quality Education (C1), Reduction of Racial Isolation (C2), and Instructional Implementation (C3) are shown below. The percentages of positive responses were slightly higher for black parents than for white parents although they were not significant ($p < .05$).

	C1-Quality Education	C2-Racial Relations	C3-Instructional Implementation
White	78	82	72
Black	80	85	75

A correlation was computed on the 20 independent items in Table 3 for black and white parents. The r of .93 indicates an extremely high agreement between the parents of both groups on all items. One additional correlation was computed to compare the two racial groups on parent satisfaction. The point-biserial r of race with parent satisfaction was .003, which means that no relationship could be found between parent satisfaction and race. These findings lead further support to the conclusion that parent satisfaction was independent of one's race.

The responses of the parents of children who were bussed or not bussed are in Table 4. The parents whose children were bussed to school, 76% of the sample, perceived the Magnet Programs as significantly better than the parents whose children were not bussed. Parents of bussed students rated the schools significantly higher in the areas of Quality Education/Satisfaction and in Positive Racial Relations.

	C1-Quality Education	C2-Racial Relations	C3-Instructional Implementation
Bussed	83*	88*	74
Not Bussed	70	75	79

* $p < .05$, asterisk placed on the more positive percentage.

Large differences existed between perceptions of parents of bussed and non-bussed students in the areas of Better Teachers, Student Satisfaction, and How Different their school was from last year's school. In each case, the perceptions were more favorable for parents of bussed students. To an extent, these differences may be due to the fact that children who were not bussed were returning to the same school attended last year.

Differences were observed in most of the other areas. The additional areas where significant differences were found are listed below (for all areas, except transportation, parents of bussed children reported the more positive responses).

Parent Impact
Relationships between black and white students
Racial Attitudes of students
Positive Racial Relations
Reducing Racial Isolation
Learning
Transportation
Parent Satisfaction

The differences in the four questions relating to racial relations are very difficult to interpret when viewed in juxtaposition to the breakdown of black parents and white parents responses (Table 3). All that can really be stated is that there were perceived differences, and the parents of students who were bussed had more positive perceptions.

CONCLUSION

While not conclusive, the results of these surveys do imply that if educational alternatives such as the magnet schools are used, parents of the school community will become more involved in educational processes and be more satisfied with the education their children are receiving. This increased satisfaction and involvement occurs independently of race and does not appear to be negatively influenced by bussing.

TABLE 1 PPQ

	% of Parent Responses PRIVATE SCHOOLS	MAGNET SCHOOLS	NON-MAGNET PUBLIC SCHOOLS	BLACK	WHITE	TOTAL
Sample Size	72	60	117	154	99	278
1. Frequently to nearly always go to PTA Meetings	67*†	43	31	48	41	45
2. Frequently to nearly always go to other school activities	73*	74*	50	59	66	62
3. Frequently to nearly always go to parent advisory meetings	62*	46*	29	43	48	44
4. Have observed your child(ren) in class two or more times	62	72	60	79δ	47	68
5. Have talked with the teacher(s) two or more times	97*	94	89	94	91	93
6. Have donated at least 1-4 hours per month to school(s)	67*	61*	40	51	54	50
7. Parents' Impact at school (no impact/ large impact)	5/62*	4/63*	7/36	4/55	6/48	6/53
8. Parental Involvement (Quest. 1-7 combined)	70*	66*	48	61	56	59
9. Your child(ren) rides a bus to school	26	72*†	28	43	34	38
10. To what ethnic or racial group do you belong? (white/black)	30/65	46/49	42/57			38/59
11. Highest educational level completed by mother (in years 12.0=high school graduate)	12.5*†	11.6*	11.0	11.7	11.5	11.5
12. Highest educational level completed by father (in years 12.0=high school graduate)	12.3*†	11.6*	11.0	11.6	11.7	11.6
13. I favor the Magnet School Concept	82*	95*†	68	87δ	68	80
14. If the Magnet Schools were substantially increased I would have my child(ren) apply	42	89*†	54	70δ	52	62

* $p < .05$ Private vs. non-magnet public or Magnet vs. non-magnet public, more positive response marked

† $p < .05$ Private vs. Magnet, more positive response marked

δ $p < .05$ Black vs. White, more positive response marked

TABLE 2

Percent of Parent Responses on MPQ

	Sample Size	359	(responses from Pilot parents not included)
1.	School Continued - YES	96	
2.	Quality Education-Moderate to very successful	89	
3.	Unique Curriculum-Moderate to very successful	84	
4.	Parent Satisfaction - YES	92	
5.	Quality of Staff-Moderate to severe problem	11	
6.	Quality of Administration-Moderate to severe problem	10	
7.	School Different - Quite different	87	
8.	Impact - No/Large	7/48	
9.	Student Satisfaction-Less/More	8/74	
10.	Student Learning-Less/More	7/69	
11.	Teachers-Worse/Better	6/60	
12.	C1 Quality Education (Items 1-11)	80	
13.	Reducing Racial Isolation-Moderate to very successful	77	
14.	Positive Racial Relationships-Moderate to very successful	80	
15.	Relations between black and white students - Moderate to severe problem	13	
16.	Racial Attitudes of students-Moderate to severe problem	12	
17.	Racial Attitudes of staff-Moderate to severe problem	11	
18.	C2 Reducing Racial Isolation (Items 13-17)	84	
19.	Transportation-Moderate to severe problem	39	
20.	Basic Supplies-Moderate to severe problem	18	
21.	Textbooks-Moderate to severe problem	20	
22.	Special Supplies-Moderate to severe problem	24	
23.	C3 Instructional Implementation (Items 19-22)	75	

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF PARENT RESPONSES OF WHITE AND BLACK CHILDREN

	PERCENT RESPONSE OF	Black Parents	White Parents
	Sample Size	231	163
1.	School Continued - YES	97	95
2.	Quality Education-Moderate to very successful	89	88
3.	Unique Curriculum-Moderate to very successful	84	84
4.	Parent Satisfaction - YES	92	91
5.	Quality of Staff-Moderate to severe problem	13	9
6.	Quality of Administration-Moderate to severe problem	10	11
7.	School Different - Quite Different	84	85
8.	Impact - No/Large	8/54*	9/42
9.	Student Satisfaction-Less/More	7/73	10/68
10.	Student Learning-Less/More	7/70	9/66
11.	Teachers-Worse/Better	6/61	8/62
12.	C1 Quality Education (Items 1-11)	80	78
13.	Reducing Racial Isolation Mod. to very successful	74	77
14.	Positive Racial Relationships-Moderate to very successful	83	76
15.	Relations between Black and White students-Moderate to severe problem	10*	18
16.	Racial Attitudes of students-Moderate to severe problem	9*	18
17.	Racial Attitudes of staff-Moderate to severe problem	11	8
18.	C2 Reducing Racial Isolation (Items 13-17)	85	82
19.	Transportation-Moderate to severe problem	35	37
20.	Basic Supplies-Moderate to severe problem	16	20
21.	Textbooks-Moderate to severe problem	16*	25
22.	Special Supplies-Moderate to severe problem	19*	31
23.	C3 Instructional Implementation (Items 19-22)	79	72

* $p < .05$ asterisk is placed on the more positive percentage

TABLE 4

Comparison of Parent Responses of Bussed and Not Bussed Children	% of Responses of Parents with Children Bussed	% of Responses of Parents with Children Not Bussed
Sample Size	264	85
1. Continue School - YES	98*	92
2. Quality Education - Moderate to very successful	91*	83
3. Unique Curriculum - Moderate to very successful	86*	77
4. Parent Satisfaction - YES	95*	85
5. Quality of Staff- Moderate to severe problem	11	10
6. Quality of Administration - Moderate to severe problem	9	13
7. School is different - Quite	92*	71
8. Impact - No/Large	6/53*	11/35
9. Student Satisfaction - Less/More	7/80*	11/54
10. Learning - Less/More	6/72*	9/59
11. Teachers - Worse/Better	7/67*	5/39
12. C1 Quality Education (Items 1-11)	83*	70
13. Reducing Racial Isolation - Moderate to very successful	81*	67
14. Positive Racial Relationships - Moderate to very successful	84*	70
15. Relations between black and white students - Moderate to severe problem	9*	25
16. Racial Attitudes of Students - Moderate to severe problem	8*	23
17. Racial Attitudes of Staff - Moderate to severe problem	10	13
18. C2 Reducing Racial Isolation (Items 13-17)	88*	75
19. Transportation - Moderate to severe problem	42	30*
20. Basic Supplies - Moderate to severe problem	18	17
21. Textbooks - Moderate to severe problem	19	18
22. Special Supplies - Moderate to severe problem	25	20
23. C3 Instructional Implementation (Items 19-22)	74	79

* $p < .05$ asterisk is placed on the more positive percentage

APPENDIX A

MAGNET/PILOT PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Parent:

The Division of Evaluation of the St. Louis Public Schools is conducting a survey of parents to determine how they feel about the magnet or pilot school programs that their children have attended this year. Your assistance in answering these questions will help us to plan next year's program. Since you may have children attending different schools, we have printed the same set of questions three times, to give you the chance to answer the questions on up to three different schools. At the top of each set of questions, please PRINT the name of the Magnet or Pilot school that you are answering for, then answer all the questions in that set as they apply to the Magnet or Pilot school named. If you have children in another school, then move to the second set of questions, PRINT the name of that school, and answer the questions again for the second school named. If you have children in a third Magnet or Pilot school, then complete the third set of questions for that school. You don't need to answer the questions for each child you have in the same school, but only for each school in which you have children. For example, if you have two children attending the Investigative Learning Center at Stix School, and one in the College Prep Program at Sumner, then you need to complete only one set of questions for Stix School and one for Sumner. Now, please turn the page and begin.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION.

MAGNET/PILOT PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME OF SCHOOL _____

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSES

1. Would you like to see this school continued?
   YES NO
2. Does your child ride a bus to school?
   YES NO
3. Indicate how successful you feel this Magnet/Pilot Program is in:

	Unsuccessful	Slightly Successful	Moderately Successful	Very Successful
a) providing a quality education?	1	2	3	4
b) reducing racial isolation?	1	2	3	4
c) providing a unique curriculum?	1	2	3	4
d) maintaining positive relationships between members of different races?	1	2	3	4

4. How satisfied are you with this school?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4

5. Listed below are some major aspects of the Magnet/Pilot school program. For each of these, please indicate the extent to which it has been a problem at this magnet/pilot school.

	Severe Problem	Moderate Problem	Slight Problem	No Problem
a) Transportation	1	2	3	4
b) Basic supplies (pencils, etc.)	1	2	3	4
c) Textbooks	1	2	3	4
d) Special supplies & equipment (musical instruments, microscopes, computers, etc.)	1	2	3	4
e) Quality of teaching staff	1	2	3	4
f) Quality of school administration	1	2	3	4
g) Relations between Black and White students	1	2	3	4
h) Racial attitudes of students	1	2	3	4
i) Racial attitudes of teachers	1	2	3	4

6. How different do you think this school is from other schools your children have attended?
   No real difference Quite different Very different
7. How much impact do the parents have on what happens at this school?
   Large impact Slight impact No impact
8. How does your child like this school compared to the one attended last year?
   More About the same Less
9. Compared to last year, do you feel your child is learning?
   More About the same Less
10. Compared to last year, do you feel this year's teachers are?
    Better About the same Worse

QUESTION 11 CONTAINS INFORMATION WHICH IS PERSONAL, BUT WHICH WILL ASSIST US IN INTERPRETING THE RESULTS OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. THE INFORMATION IS VOLUNTARY, AND IS ANONYMOUS SINCE WE HAVE NO WAY TO IDENTIFY YOUR RESPONSE WITH YOU.

11. To what ethnic or racial group do you belong?
    White Black Spanish/Mexican American Other

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED. THANK YOU.

PARENT PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Parent:
The Division of Evaluation of the St. Louis Public Schools is conducting a survey to determine how parents feel about their involvement with regular public, magnet, and private/parochial schools. We ask that you complete this questionnaire and send it back to us in the enclosed envelope. Please DO NOT put your name on this form. We have no way of identifying the answers of individual parents: therefore, your answers will be completely anonymous. Please return the completed survey by Friday, May 6.

1. How many of your children attend public or private/parochial schools this year?
   Public _____ Private/Parochial _____

PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS BASED ON THIS SCHOOL YEAR, 1976-77 AND CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSES.

		Seldom		Frequently	Nearly Always
2.	How often do you attend:				
	a) school PTA meetings?	1		2	3
	b) other school sponsored activities (e.g., plays, concerts, performances, Open House?)	1		2	3
	c) citizens or parent advisory meetings	1		2	3

3.	How many times have you visited school:				
	a) to observe your children in class?	1	2	3	4 or More
	b) to talk with the teacher?	1	2	3	4 or More

4. On the average, how many hours per month do you donate to schools your children attend? 0 1-4 5-8 9-12 13 or More

5. If you have children in parochial as well as in public school, how many of the hours reported in Item (4) above are given to the:
   a) public school(s) _____ hrs.
   b) private/parochial school(s) _____ hrs.

6. Are you in favor of the magnet school concept of the St. Louis Public Schools?
   YES NO

7. Are any of your children attending the magnet schools?
   YES NO
   7.1 If YES, which schools do they attend?
   a) School 1_____
   b) School 2_____
   c) School 3_____
   7.2 If NO, did any apply?
   YES NO

PLEASE TURN THE PAGE.

8. If the number of magnet schools was substantially increased, would you have any of your children apply?
   YES NO

9. Does your child ride a bus to school?
   YES NO

10. How much impact do parents have on what happens at your child's school?
    No Impact Slight Impact Large Impact

QUESTIONS 10 and 11 CONTAIN INFORMATION WHICH IS PERSONAL, BUT WHICH WILL ASSIST US IN INTERPRETING THE RESULTS OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. THE INFORMATION IS VOLUNTARY, AND IS ANONYMOUS SINCE WE HAVE NO WAY TO IDENTIFY YOUR RESPONSES WITH YOU.

11. To what ethnic or racial group do you belong?
    White Black Spanish/Mexican American Other

12. What is the highest education level completed by any parent(s)/guardian(s) living at home? (Circle the correct response)

		High School								College				Graduate			
Mother or female guardian	1-5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		1	2	3	4	1	2	MA	PhD or equivalent
Father or male guardian	1-5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		1	2	3	4	1	2	MA	PhD or equivalent

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.